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REGION 10 BULLETIN NO: 07-22

**SUBJECT: NOAA Determines That Steelhead Are Threatened,
Warranting Protection Under Endangered Species Act**

PROGRAM AREAS: Planning and Environmental

DATE: May 23, 2007

On May 11, 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) published a final determination that Puget Sound steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The agency has determined that all naturally spawned winter-run and summer-run steelhead populations are "threatened," meaning they are likely to become an endangered species in the foreseeable future throughout all of their range.

That range includes steelhead from the river basins of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound and Hood Canal, Washington, bounded to the west by the Elwha River and to the north by the Nooksack River and Dakota Creek (inclusive). (See below for a link to a NOAA map.) The listed group of steelhead – called a distinct population segment (DPS) under the ESA – includes only anadromous (ocean-going) forms of *O. mykiss*, and not resident forms (commonly called rainbow trout). The listed DPS includes winter-run hatchery stocks from the Green and Hamma Hamma Rivers. The majority of hatchery stocks are not considered part of this DPS because they are more than moderately diverged from the local native populations.

The listing will become effective on June 11, 2007, after which federal agencies must consult with NOAA Fisheries on actions they carry out, fund or authorize. NOAA Fisheries Service intends to issue ESA protective regulations for Puget Sound steelhead and to identify areas that may warrant designation as critical habitat in separate rulemaking.

For FTA to award any grant after June 11, 2007, FTA must have information supporting the conclusion that the project will not adversely affect steelhead, either directly or indirectly. If a grantee has already submitted environmental information for a pending grant award, that information must be updated to include an assessment of impacts on steelhead.

Background information:

- The Puget Sound steelhead DPS includes more than 50 stocks of summer- and winter-run fish, the latter being the most widespread and numerous of the two run types. Most

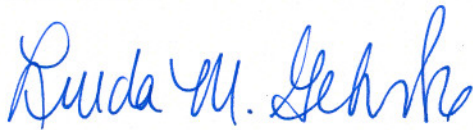
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steelhead production occurs in northern Puget Sound where the Skagit and Snohomish rivers support the largest populations.

- Scientists assessed the overall viability of this DPS and concluded that there is: (1) a high risk to the viability of Puget Sound steelhead because of declining productivity and abundance; (2) a moderate risk because of reduced spatial complexity of, and connectivity among, populations; and (3) a moderate risk because of the reduced life-history diversity of populations and the potential threats posed by artificial propagation and harvest practices in Puget Sound.
- Resident *O. mykiss* (rainbow trout) occur within the range of Puget Sound steelhead, but are not part of the DPS because of marked differences in physical, physiological, ecological and behavioral characteristics.
- NOAA also concluded that, at present, protective efforts in Puget Sound do not substantially mitigate the factors threatening the future viability of steelhead, nor do they ameliorate the scientists' assessment of extinction risk.
- Steelheads have an unusual life history that makes studying and protecting them a challenge. Unlike most other members of the Pacific salmon family, steelhead do not necessarily die after spawning, and some can remain in fresh water as resident rainbow trout, although rainbows are not covered by NOAA's listing.

For further information, please contact Dan Drais at 206-220-4463, or daniel.drais@dot.gov.

Sincerely,



 R.F. Krochalis
Regional Administrator

Graphic showing rivers included in listing:

http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/ESA-Salmon-Listings/Salmon-Populations/Steelhead/images/PS_steelhead_Chinook.jpg

Federal Register final listing determination:

<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Publications/FR-Notices/2007/upload/72FR26722.pdf>